

CHAPTER XIV

THE GRADE OF PRACTICUS, 3 = 8



THE GRADE OF PRACTICUS CORRESPONDS to the eighth circle of the Tree of Life, named HVD, *Hod*, "Splendor." *Hod* is the Sphere of Mercury; hence, the activities of this Grade are dominated by the mode of consciousness represented in Tarot by Key 1, The Magician. It is the Grade of those who have passed from the study of theory to the experimental work that establishes the correctness of that theory.

This work consists largely in mental practices carried on at the level of self-consciousness. It is practice in the art of inductive reasoning, in the drawing of logical inferences from experience, in the development by induction of the general truths to be ascertained from examining a controlled series of events.

This experimental work is indicated by the eighth statement in the *Pattern on the Trestleboard*: "I look forward with confidence to the perfect realization of the Eternal Splendor of the Limitless Light." The Practicus works with the tools on the Magician's table: the Wand of will, the Cup of mental imagery, the Sword of action, and the Pentacle of actual physical conditions.

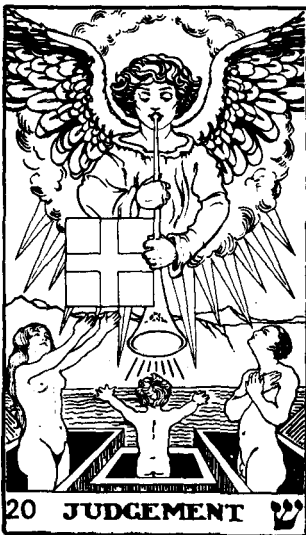
This Grade corresponds also to the eighth of the Thirty-two Paths of Wisdom, termed the Perfect or Absolute Intelligence, concerning which it is written: "The preparation of principles emanates therefrom." It is furthermore said that the roots to which the eighth path adheres are in the depths of the Sphere Magnificence, that is, in the depths of *Chesed*, the fourth circle of the Tree of Life, corresponding to the Grade of Exempt Adept, the highest Grade of the Second Order.

The work of the Practicus is concerned with the preparation of principles, that is, with the combination of principles so as to produce predetermined effects. Yet the roots of this work go still higher and are to

be found in the depths of the sphere named *Chesed*, or Mercy. *Chesed* represents the Divine Beneficence, and the essential idea connected with *Chesed*, as we shall see more definitely in Chapter XVIII, is that of *receptivity*. This same receptivity is clearly symbolized in Key 1 of Tarot, for The Magician holds his right hand aloft, to show that the primary and most important function of self-consciousness and its power of inductive reasoning is to maintain man's contact with the superconscious level of the Life Power's action. In other words, the logical inference to be drawn from human experience, rightly understood, is that personality and self-consciousness are but the instruments and vehicles of something higher. Hence, the first work of occult practice is to maintain consciously the attitude of voluntary receptivity to direction recognized as coming from above.

DOCTRINES OF THE GRADE

The adjective translated "Perfect" in the title of the eighth path is ShLM, *Shalom*, in Hebrew. It also means "well, peaceful, happy," and it is the root of the Hebrew proper name ShLMH, *Shelomoh*, or Solomon. The three primary doctrines of the Grade of Practicus correspond to the three letters of ShLM and to the Tarot Keys representing those letters, as follows:



1. JUDGMENT
Key 20 (Sh)

Human life, even now, extends beyond the limits of the physical world.

Even now we live in what is known to some as the Fourth Dimension. Relatively few human beings have even the slightest intellectual realization of this fact, but it is a fact, and it applies to every man and woman on earth. Even now we are immortals, though our misunderstanding of the meaning of death and the imperfect organization of certain centers in our brains prevent us from knowing that we were never born and will never, never, never die.

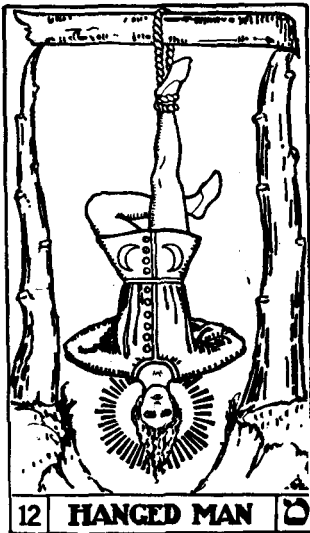


2. JUSTICE
Key 11 (L)

All the activities of the universe are held in equilibrium.

For many persons this is hard to understand. Inequality and injustice are *apparent* everywhere, but the esoteric doctrine states plainly that this appearance is untrue. It does not say, you will observe, that justice will prevail in some distant future. It declares emphatically that perfect balance is maintained continually. The doctrine is that for every action there is an immediate reaction; that the Law of Compensation is always in operation; that if we could see the whole past, we should find

not one least deviation from strict justice in all the events that have culminated in the present moment.



3. THE HANGED MAN
Key 12 (M)

The personal man is never the thinker, the speaker, nor the actor. Any thought, any word, any deed is the operation of the sum total of cosmic forces and laws, taking particular form in time and space, through the instrumentality of a human being (or other vehicle of the Cosmic Life).

This third truth, until its import is grasped, seems like fatalism. It appears to make man a mere puppet. Yet it is a truth reiterated by all wise men, who all insist, furthermore, that it is not in the least fatalistic. They tell us that the reason it seems to be so is that human beings do not really know what they mean when they say "I." When this ig-

norance is corrected by right knowledge, the center of consciousness is no longer located in personality. It is shifted to the Real Self, and that Self is perceived as being identical with the Originating Principle of the universe. The personal life is lost, but the Cosmic Life is found. An illusion is exchanged for a reality. A counterfeit freedom is renounced in order that real freedom may be enjoyed.

What the Practicus endeavors to perfect is the mental attitude expressed in these three truths. To achieve this result he must be continually on the watch. Such watchfulness is distinctly an operation of the self-consciousness and is therefore properly related to the Sphere of Mercury.

What is aimed at here is the formation of new habits of thought. Nobody ever truly realizes that his personality is a vehicle for universal life unless he affirms and reaffirms the idea and exercises all the ingenuity he can muster to find new ways of reminding himself that this is true.

Actual dependence on cosmic law and perfect self-surrender to its operation requires as much practice as one needs to learn to sing, or write, or dance. Just saying, "I surrender," now and then, will not produce the desired result. Many gentle, suave repetitions are required before we succeed in "separating the earth from the fire, the subtle from the gross," i.e., before we make a conscious distinction between the physical vehicle of life and Life itself. Above all things, we must take care too that none of these are *vain* repetitions. Spirit and intention must be in our efforts. We must not go mechanically through any words or formulas. All of this, as has been said, demands intense watchfulness.

Poise is one of the meanings of Justice in Tarot, and to gain poise takes practice. A few perfunctory relaxation exercises will never build a poised personality. We must, to be sure, relax at regular periods; but what brings the best results is the habit of perpetual watchfulness, which makes us aware of the *beginnings* of tensions and anxieties. Repeated reflection on the teaching of Ageless Wisdom that all events are ordered according to a law of undeviating justice is an important feature of the practice that leads to personal poise. Beginners often have great difficulty with this teaching, but none is more emphatically insisted on by the Teachers. Meditation on it and continual endeavor to see the law of equilibrium at work in every experience is enjoined on the Practicus.

He also devotes himself to becoming familiar with the idea that even now part of his consciousness is having what we call "fourth-dimensional experience." This is easier to grasp when we understand that every human being has bodies of finer texture than the physical. The physical body is the outermost of the vehicles of the I AM. It is composed of vibrations of energy that are slower and grosser than those of higher vehicles. It is, moreover, corrupted by errors of race thought, and it is far from being perfectly adapted to the transmission of the finer modes of the Life Power's activity.

The physical body needs tuning; and part of the Rosicrucian work is a method of attunement that puts us in a proper position to receive the finer, higher vibrations of our subtle bodies, which already experience the phenomena of the higher planes of existence. Every human being, even the lowest savage, has fourth-dimensional consciousness; but awareness of that

consciousness on the physical plane requires a special kind of physiological development. It is to this that Brother C.R.'s sojourn at Damascus and his subsequent training in the Temple at Damcar, as described in the *Fama*, allude. As is hinted there, the training brings about subtle chemical changes in the bloodstream and microscopic alterations of cell structure, chiefly in the brain and the sympathetic nervous system.

Perhaps a simple comparison will make this clearer. In the room where you are reading, a great many different etheric vibrations are doubtless being set up at this moment by impulses sent out from various broadcasting stations. Unless you have a radio set, properly built and correctly tuned, you hear none of these vibrations. Yet they are actually present, and you can hear them whenever you tune in. Your physical body is a much finer receiving set than any radio built by man. At present, however, some of the parts essential to reception may not be, in media parlance, "hooked up." These parts of your physical organism may be correctly adjusted by occult practice. When this is accomplished, you will be able to tune in so as to become aware of rates of vibration that now seem to be nonexistent.

All that has just been outlined is part of the "vision of possibility" the Practicus works to perfect. "Where there is no vision," says the Bible, "the people perish." Vision may be strengthened. Just as plants are cultivated by a gardener, so may the functions of foresight and confident expectation be developed by intelligent practice directed to that end. The grossest of errors is the notion that the gift of vision is an accident of birth. Every human being has the seeds of genuine seership. We are all potential prophets.

In no essential particular does the development of these functions differ from the development of such functions as walking or speaking. First comes the attempt to perform the required action—and these attempts fail again and again, at first. Yet every trial brings one nearer to success.

How often, do you suppose, did you fall while you were learning to walk? If you swim, how many failures preceded your first successful stroke? Countless apparently fruitless endeavors precede every successful attempt to gain skill in the most ordinary physical activities. With practice, the manuscript for a page like this may be written in fifteen minutes; but when one begins to learn typewriting, it takes longer to write a few imperfect lines. Yet not a few persons who profess interest in occult training are ready to give up the work and to condemn esoteric teaching as nonsensical just because their first ten or twenty attempts to concentrate do not put them immediately in touch with the Inner School.

Many a student has sat working at concentration for more than ten months, in half-hour periods twice daily, before perceiving the slightest indication of a result. Among the Brethren of the True and Invisible Order are some who have devoted lifetimes to developing the skill they now

exercise. Some of the best work that ever has been done has been accomplished by persons in the midst of a hard struggle for daily bread, by persons having little or no leisure for special occult practice.

Hence the excuse "I haven't time for study or practice," fails to convince one who knows what occult work really is. We all have plenty of time, but the lazy habits of the race mind lead us astray. If we don't practice, it is not because we are too busy. It is because we really prefer to do something else.

The only failure is failure to try, and try again and again. Our attempts, however, are more likely to succeed if we have some clear notion of what we are aiming to accomplish, and some knowledge of the laws and forces we seek to utilize. This is why the Grade of Practicus comes third in the Rosicrucian series, following a Grade devoted to theory.

In all this mental practice it is well to remember that one is dealing with an actual force. Eliphas Levi called it "Astral Light," and described it as follows:

There exists a force in nature which is far more powerful than steam, by means of which a single man, who can master it, and knows how to direct it, might throw the world into confusion and transform its face. It is diffused throughout infinity; it is the substance of heaven and earth. When it produces radiance it is called light. It is substance and motion at one and the same time; it is a fluid and a perpetual vibration. In infinite space, it is ether, or etherized light; it becomes astral light in the stars which it magnetizes, while in organized beings it becomes magnetic light or fluid. The will of intelligent beings acts directly on this light, and by means thereof, upon all nature, which is made subject to the modifications of intelligence.¹

The same writer gives a valuable suggestion in relation to the work undertaken in the Grade of Practicus when he says: "Every individuality is indefinitely perfectible, since the moral order is analogous to the physical, and in the physical order we cannot conceive a point which is unable to dilate or enlarge itself, and radiate in a philosophically infinite circle. What can be said of the entire soul must also be predicated of each faculty thereof. The understanding and the will of man are instruments which are incalculable in their power and capacity."²

¹Eliphas Levi, *The Mysteries of Magic* (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1897), 68, 69.

²Eliphas Levi, *The Mysteries of Magic*, 66.

The same thought is contained in a passage in the *Book of Formation* that speaks of restoring the Creator to his throne. Human understanding, human examination and research, human knowledge and calculation and writing—these are means by which the Creator may be restored to his throne. Has He ever been dethroned? Not really; but human error has placed Him on a mythical seat in the sky instead of on the true throne at the center of human existence. Study of the ten aspects of the One Reality, which is the real purpose of our examination of these Rosicrucian Grades, corrects this error. It restores to man his knowledge that the creative, controlling power of the universe is a real presence within the heart of man.

Because of that real presence, because "All the power that ever was or will be, is here now," the vehicles through which that power manifests its omnipotence must be indefinitely perfectible. These words fall under your eyes because the time has arrived in the course of your development when you are ready to be awakened to the truth they set before you. Nobody who is not ready will ever read these lines.

This does not mean that every reader will instantly accept the ideas set forth in this book. On the contrary, some will scoff and reject this teaching utterly. Nevertheless, even the scoffer will not read until he is ready. The mental attitude of self-consciousness is by no means the final arbiter.

You, whoever you may be, who read these words, know this. Henceforth you will never be quite the same. You have touched something more potent, more lasting, more far-reaching than you dream. It stirs in you an activity that eventually will ripen into realization. If now you scoff, the Masters of Compassion grieve for you, because they know life has in store for you bitter lessons of pain, which will break the shell of selfish unbelief that now limits the expression of your higher powers. But if when you read these words an echo seems to stir in you, as of things long forgotten reviving in the depths of your soul, They rejoice with you, knowing that for you the happiness of release is near at hand.

From the Grade of Practicus three paths lead to higher Grades, but of these only the twenty-seventh path of the letter Peh is open, leading to the Grade of Philosophus. Before this path may be entered, the twenty-ninth and twenty-eighth paths must be traversed.

The twenty-sixth path of Ayin remains closed until the aspirant's advancement to the Grade of Philosophus is completed. The twenty-third path of Mem is not open until the Grade of Lesser Adept has been attained. Yet both these paths begin in the Grade of Practicus, because the skill gained in that Grade is what enables the aspirant to pass through them. That skill, remember, is developed by continually practicing the intellectual perception of what may be confidently expected as the outcome of the creative process. This is expressed by the eighth statement of the *Pattern on the Trestleboard*: "I look forward with confidence to the perfect realization of the Eternal Splendor of the Limitless Light."

Three other truths, based on the esoteric meaning of the letters in the word *Hod* (HVD) are taught in the Grade of Practicus. They are as follows:



THE EMPEROR

Key 4 (H)

The original Creative Power, the rational Life that makes, frames, and composes the Universe, directs every detail of cosmic manifestation; hence there are no accidents. Nothing happens by chance. Consequently, every detail of any person's experience is a particular manifestation of this directing Power, a particular note in the universal symphony. That directing Power is the true Seer of all we see, the true Knower of all we know, the supreme Authority over all creation. It only is the Indivisible self.

Here again is a doctrine that may easily be mistaken for fatalism, and when it is so mistaken it paralyzes initiative. But the key to right understanding is the Rosicrucian teaching that the Supreme Authority is not something external to human personality but rather a reality enthroned within the personality. At one and the same moment it is present in all persons, and is that to which all refer when they think or speak of Self. That the majority have no adequate notion of the Self does not change the fact.



5. THE HIEROPHANT

Key 5 (V)

The Self is enthroned above the level of personal consciousness, and from that superior station directs by its infallible Word those who have ears to hear.

Thus the Book of Proverbs puts these words into the mouth of Wisdom: "Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of man. . . . Hear; for I will speak of excellent things; and the opening of my lips shall be right things" (Prov. 8:4,6). Of similar import is this promise: "And though Jehovah give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy

teachers: And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left" (Isaiah 30:20,21). Direct vision of the teachers, the Brothers of the Invisible Order, is an experience shared by many in these days, and many more have learned that the Voice or Word of the Indivisible Self is always ready with counsel in season.



6. THE EMPRESS

Key 3 (D)

All substance is mental substance, hence all forms are mental images. The production of mental images is the function of the Universal Subconsciousness, and from that function all forms, on all planes, have their immediate origin.

The doctrine here is identical with Oriental teachings. Man has dominion over nature because what appears to be "material" is really mental. The stuff from which a rock is made is not different in substance from that which takes form in our thoughts. Here we come very close to the alchemical doctrine of the First Matter, declared in the axiom of Hermes:

"All things are from one, by the mediation of one, and all things have their birth from this one thing, by adaptation."